

Testimony of Christine Levine, M.S., J.D., BCBA in support of SB477

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of SB 477. My name is Christine Levine. I am the clinical director of Creative Interventions, an agency that provides therapeutic services to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. I have been in the field for 15 years working. I have state certification in special education, am a BCBA and have a law degree.

I frequently conduct assessments with toddlers to determine if a child has an autism spectrum disorder. For those children who do meet the criteria for an ASD, one of the family's primary concerns is what will my child be able to do when he is 18. A very common question is, will he be able to work? Unfortunately, despite significant progress in early intervention, even children who do very well in Birth to Three and have good special education services, are not able to work or live independently as adults, because there are no services available for them as adults. There are many people with ASD who have developed some very good skills in school, but remain unable to work because that process has not been facilitated. These individuals often end up quite isolated, after working so hard to mainstream them into regular education. Many of these individuals can end of with depression.

I think the best way to illustrate this is with an example. We have a 17 year old boy with Asperger's Syndrome. He also has an anxiety disorder and a mood disorder. When he came to us a few years ago, he had extreme difficulty with his social interactions, to the point that he needed to be hospitalized on several occasions. His self-esteem was extremely low and he lacked any motivation. He isolated himself at home and only wanted to play video games by himself. The biggest change that we have seen in him happened after we gave him a job at our office doing clerical work with the assistance of a job coach. Today, he is like a different person. He looks forward to coming to work and he is friendly with the staff here. He now has goals for himself for the first time in his life. He now feels like he is a part of something and that he is contributing. He has pride in his work and feels like he has a sense of purpose.

Here, in his own words, is how he expresses what having a job means to him.

I feel that the passing of SB 477 will help for many others like Morgan to be included in society.